

# **Towards “Soft Boundaries” Pro-poor Tourism and Cross-border Collaboration in the Arid Areas of Southern Africa**

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## **1 Introduction**

In the central hinterland of South Africa, Botswana and Namibia lies a vast arid area. This area is known as the Karoo (in the south-central parts), in the west, Richtersveld and Namib in the north-west, and Gordonia, Bushmanland, Griqualand, and the Kalahari in the north. For the purposes of this paper, we will refer to these areas as the “Nama Karoo”, which is the ecological name for the area consisting primarily of small desert shrubs and grasses. “Karoo” is an ancient Bushman word (the “San people”), meaning “dry place”.

This area straddles four provinces in South Africa (Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Northern Cape and Free State), and stretches into the sovereign states of Namibia and Botswana.

Very important ecological research has recently been done by several universities in these regions, particularly in Namibia, Namaqualand and the Karoo. But there has been a general neglect of social, economic and political issues. Many natural scientists are now recognizing the importance of linking ecological research with issues of a more social and economic nature, particularly in the light of changes in land use by commercial and emergent farmers. This raises the question of adapting and planning socio-economic development to fit the constraints of the ecological biome - a biome which straddles provincial and national boundaries.

This paper will pose the question of the potential of cross-border collaboration for developmental purposes. This topic affects a wide range of developmental questions, including business development, agriculture, water, electricity, roads and transport, including air and rail. In this paper, we will focus on the prospects of regional tourism, and its potential for pro-poor

development, in the arid provinces of South Africa, as well as their neighbours, Namibia and Botswana. Desert tourism has become increasingly significant throughout the world, to the extent that the United Nations' World Tourism Organisation has published a document entitled Sustainable Development of Tourism in Deserts – Guide for Decision Makers (2007).

The paper will also examine the likelihood of cross-boundary (including cross-provincial and trans-national) development in the Nama Karoo. As yet, such a discourse is in its infancy in Southern Africa, because provincial and national boundaries remain barriers to integrated planning thinking. In one field – ecotourism – significant progress regarding cross-border co-operation has been made, although there is a great deal of scope for a more unified approach to tourism in general. Tourism, as a sector, is particularly appropriate for cross-border development, particularly where areas share key characteristics – “a sense of place”. Tourists are often trans-border markets – they like to travel, and they do not want to be restricted by administrative borders.

But growth in tourism needs to create developmental impacts beyond local elites. Tourism has significant potential impacts on local communities, including the poor. The paper will highlight different possibilities for pro-poor tourism in this region.

## **2 Spatial Background**

The arid areas in Southern Africa extend throughout the south-western parts of the sub-continent, across numerous local, district, provincial and national jurisdictions. In South Africa, the Nama Karoo stretches about 600 km from west to east, and also about 600 km north to south within South Africa, and another 400 km northwards into Namibia. It is an area of level plains, crisscrossed by low and stony mountain ranges, with a vegetation consisting primarily of small shrubs interspersed by grass. In some areas, dramatic canyons transect the plains. The Kalahari, located north of the Karoo, stretches another 500 km, into Botswana. The Kalahari is famous for its red sand dunes, thorny bushveld, grassy plains, and many types of wildlife. Namaqualand, along the western coast, consists of an area about 200 km from north to south. Namaqualand is rightly famous for its astonishing succulent plants, which create a “desert garden” filled with flowers during springtime. The Richtersveld is a harsh, stony desert, located north of Namaqualand, and

straddles the Namibian border. North of that, the sandy Namib desert covers about 250 km from the Namibian coastline.

**Figure 1: The Arid Areas of Southern Africa**

The sheer size of the Nama Karoo has meant that it has never been administered as a coherent entity. In Botswana, the arid southern areas straddle four jurisdictions (Ghanzi, Kgalagadi, Ngwaketse and Kweneng); and in Namibia, it includes the two southern districts (Karas and Hardap), as well as the western part of Namibia. The Nama Karoo in South Africa straddles four provinces and 10 district municipalities. It also includes 31 local municipalities: 7 in the Eastern Cape, 2 in the Free State, 14 in the Northern Cape, and 8 in the Eastern Cape.

## 2.1 Socio-economic Indicators

The arid areas are sparsely populated. Table 1 shows the size of the geographic area, as well as characteristics of the local population, in the South African arid areas.

**Table 1: The Arid Areas of South Africa**

District Municipality	Land surface (Km <sup>2</sup> )	Population	% urban	% Proportion unemployed	% House-holds living in	% with no schooling	Contribution to provincial GDP
Namakwa DM (Northern Cape)	126747	108111	48.1	28.5	34.1	11.5	10%
Central Karoo DM (Western Cape)	37335	60484	72.5	36.2	27.3	9.7	0.5%
Cacadu DM (Eastern Cape)	56239	388208	69.3	35.4	44.4	15.0	Not known
Pixley ka Seme DM (Northern Cape)	96340	164603	60.8	37	43.5	26.1	10%
Siyanda DM (Northern Cape)	94073	209890	59.8	27	40.5	17.1	13%
Kgalagadi DM (Northern Cape)	24818	176909	19.8	41.9	57.1	24.6	24%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>435552</b>	<b>1108205</b>					

Source: *The Gaffney Group, 2004:6.*

Table 1 shows the huge geographic area of the arid areas (over 430 000 km<sup>2</sup>), the sparse population (an average of 2.5 people per km<sup>2</sup>), and the high levels of poverty and unemployment. On average 41 percent of the population lives below the national poverty line which is somewhat lower than the 47.7 per cent poverty rate for South Africa as whole, in 2001 (SAIRR 2007: 204).

The sparse population has contributed to the political insignificance of these areas, as the various provincial and national governments have invariably given more attention to their more populous and industrial regions.

<sup>1</sup> 2001 Census. "People in poverty" is defined as "people living in households with incomes less than the poverty income". This level of income varies with household size. In 2005, the poverty income level for one individual was R871 per month and R3,314 for a household of eight members or more (SAIRR 2007: 203).

Since the 1870s, industrialization has largely passed these areas by. The structure of small towns and extensive sheep- and goat-farming still bears the imprint of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century. During the last fifty years, extensive livestock farms have grown even larger, and shed a great deal of labour. Many of these unemployed farm workers have drifted to the small towns, to join the ranks of the urban unemployed. The recent advent of game farming has contributed to this trend, although opportunities in agri-tourism and eco-tourism are beginning to create scope for new and more sophisticated types of employment in the tourism sector.

There are worrying aspects of the socio-economic profile of the arid areas. The local economies of small towns are characterised by weak multipliers, because a great deal of purchasing power is leaked back to the larger centres, or to metropolitan areas situated outside these areas. A large proportion of income is derived from social grants (such as pensions and disability grants), and these seem to cause a mind-set of dependency. There is an out-migration of skilled people to the cities, due to a lack of local economic opportunities. Poverty levels are high, due to high levels of unemployment, and increasing rates of illness (HIV/AIDS and TB). The conditions of life of remote settlements of farm workers tend to be poor, with low mobility, and difficult access to health, education, recreation and shopping amenities. These are all socio-economic developmental challenges which need to be addressed.

## 2.2 The Tourism Potential of Southern Africa's Arid Areas

The arid areas have assets for potential development, including desert tourism and desert agriculture (such as wool, mohair, mutton, olives and indigenous plants). Infrastructure in the towns is generally good, and represents a great deal of sunk capital in housing, water, sanitation, and roads. Long-distance tarred and untarred roads are generally in a good condition.

Tourism is an important economic sector in the arid areas, with a great deal of untapped potential. Several provincial White Papers (departmental policy statements) have highlighted the need to grow this sector. The Western Cape highlights the eco-tourism, historical culture, agri-tourism, hiking, stargazing, bird watching etc. (Western Cape Government 2002). The Cacadu Tourism Spatial Development Plan in the Eastern Cape refers to the attractions of the open plains; mountains and valleys; rivers; nature reserves and wilderness areas; private game lodges; hunting and birding; hiking; biking; and horse riding. In the Northern Cape, the 2005 *White Paper on Tourism* refers to the parks, game reserves and conservancies, offering

abundant wildlife and floral diversity. There are also many cultural and heritage resources, including museums, historical sites, and monuments. There are archaeological and rock art sites, arts and cultural festivals, prominent historical figures. There are also unique and endangered cultures, such as the San communities, the Griquas, and the Namas.

Another potential area for tourism development is the game farming industry which has expanded massively in southern Africa. In South Africa, the number of game ranches has increased to about 6 000, extending over 10 million hectares, in contrast to the 3.3 million hectare total of South Africa's national parks (Viljoen and Tabela 2007:17). Registered game farms in the Northern Cape have increased dramatically: "Game ranching is replacing conventional livestock farming as a more cost-effective use of renewable natural resources" (Govender-vanWyk 2007:177). The growth in the number of game farms has been accompanied by an increase in ecotourism activities, such as game drives, hiking, bird-watching, and hunting.

The assets and challenges of the arid areas need to be addressed at an inter-district, inter-provincial and international level. They therefore pose challenges for public sector managers and policy-makers at a variety of levels. Co-operating across borders is never easy, because different jurisdictions have different policy priorities, administrative systems, and institutional capacity.

Curiously, the problem is probably as difficult across domestic (intra-national) jurisdictions, as it is across international jurisdictions. In South Africa, in particular, the provincial governments have taken on a large range of developmental functions, and have drafted provincial Growth and Development Strategies (GDS). There has, as yet, been very little co-ordination of these GDS documents, which implies that the four provinces' plans for the Karoo have developed in splendid isolation. Co-ordinating these strategies will be almost as difficult as co-ordinating national programmes.

### **3 The Relevance of Regional Development for the Arid Areas**

Internationally, there is a growing recognition of the need to plan and promote development across sub-national and national boundaries. Regional tourism is a subset of a broader question – the nature of regional development policy. While the goals of regional development may vary, the main concern is to even out the gap in life chances, employment opportunities and real income of citizens, across unequal regions (Telfer 2002: 112). Typically,

regional policies assist peripheral regions to develop economic opportunities and to balance national development outcomes. Regional planning is an effort to attain the best possible spatial pattern of development.

The definition of a “region” is somewhat controversial. Smith (1995, in Telfer 2002: 114) outlines four definitions of “region”: Firstly, it can refer to an administrative or political unit; secondly, it can have an objective set of internal similarities; and thirdly, it can be a functional region, with a high degree of internal interaction. In the case of the arid areas of southern Africa, it is primarily an objectively defined region (based on its common characteristic of aridity), but there are the inklings of a functional region, with some cross-border activities and collaboration. The purpose of this paper is to examine its potential to become a much more effective functional region, at least as far as tourism is concerned. This leads to a fourth possible definition of a region, as a “contiguous area that has been explicitly delineated by a researcher, planner or public agency as having relevance for some aspect of...planning, development or analysis” (Smith 1995: 175 in Telfer 2002: 115).

Regional development requires measures to stimulate growth poles, which contain enterprises that generate spread effects through investments, leading to cumulative growth. Economic agglomeration occurs through both forward linkages (suppliers attracting buyers) and backward linkages (buyers attracting suppliers). If tourism is to be a successful development tool, it will be essential to strengthen linkages within the local economy (Telfer 2002: 119). In fact, two sets of linkages are important: relationships with the exterior economy (including goods, services, capital, information and foreign exchange earnings), and linkages between local economic actors.

Curiously, South Africa’s spatial policy is not aimed at redressing a spatially unbalanced economy. South Africa’s National Spatial Development Perspective (NSDP) document, which is increasingly used as the framework for spatial resource allocation, has an explicit purpose to direct public investment to areas “with economic potential”. This is an explicitly pro-cyclical policy – it will support strong areas, and withdraw investment effort in areas perceived as low-potential. According to the NSDP, ‘development potential’ is based on the following criteria (NSDP 2003:18):

- Natural resource potential: agricultural potential, environmental sensitivity and the availability of water.
- Human resource potential: levels of skills and human density.
- Infrastructure resource potential: existing and proposed road and rail infrastructure and the main electricity grid.
- Human need: spread of poverty and the size of the poverty gap.

- Existing economic activity.

In South Africa, the arid areas have not, as yet, been ranked as areas with potential, and consequently, very little intellectual or policy resources have been devoted to exploring development options in the arid areas. The arid areas do have major tourism potential, as part of the “desert tourism” niche market. The flourishing example of desert tourism in Namibia points the way to much greater investment and employment opportunities in South African arid areas. Furthermore, the arid areas have the advantages of fairly sophisticated transport and telecommunications infrastructure, as well as sufficient underground water resources. The main challenge is to launch a coherent marketing effort, as there is already significant investment in tourist facilities. Additional demand will stimulate additional investment.

Regional development thinking in South Africa is not very developed, and the only interest in this direction is the South African Department of Trade and Industry’s draft Regional Industrial Development Strategy (RIDS).<sup>2</sup> This makes it much more difficult to argue the case for a focus on public investment in the arid areas.

#### **4 Regional Tourism as an Integrative Force**

Tourism has the potential to generate growth and development, because it brings financial resources into an area (either as capital investment or as the spending power of tourists), and because it encourages governments to provide infrastructure in the form of roads, transport systems, water provision and electricity. Governments can select tourism as a growth pole, which would mean that they would identify a site, and inject government and private investment into the area, possibly in the form of subsidised facilities and infrastructure. Furthermore, it is important that tourism agencies and economic development officers understand the existing linkages between firms, and how to strengthen these and build new linkages. Eventually, economic growth in the area becomes self-sustaining, and diversifies to include non-tourism activities. The growth of the residential population means that additional products and services are required, thus stimulating a wider range of markets (Telfer 2002: 121).

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<sup>2</sup> See: [www.dti.gov.za/publications/pdfrids/chapter1.pdf](http://www.dti.gov.za/publications/pdfrids/chapter1.pdf).

Tourism has certain benefits and disadvantages as a lead sector. It is beneficial, because it is labour-intensive and stimulates a wide range of entrepreneurial activities, and it is often based on rural and natural amenities which are available anyway. However, there are also negative factors: tourism often offers low paying jobs that can be seasonal, and the income derived from tourism could be lost by financial leakages from the region, which reduce the local multiplier effect. Also, tourist facilities may use up a disproportionate amount of water, energy, land, food and construction materials (Telfer 2002: 122), which may skew local prices. Tourism is not a panacea for development; it has to be managed to maximise its beneficial impacts.

A “tourism destination zone” needs several characteristics to be a meaningful developmental unit (Smith 1995: 199, in Telfer 2002: 115). The region should have a set of cultural, physical and social characteristics that create a sense of regional identity; the region should have adequate infrastructure; it should be larger than just one community or one attraction; it should be capable of supporting a tourism planning agency and marketing initiatives; and it should be accessible – by various means of transport - to a large tourist market.

Regional tourism raises two key questions: Firstly, to what extent can provinces and national governments synchronise their tourism promotion efforts? And secondly, to what extent can such efforts promote local wealth creation and community development, and help to alleviate poverty?

Tourism is now regarded by scholars and donors alike as having a major potential impact on development in Africa (Rogerson 2007: 362). In order to promote regional tourism, the SADC countries<sup>3</sup> signed a Protocol on Tourism in 1998.<sup>4</sup> The Protocol highlighted the global significance of tourism, as the world’s largest and fastest growing industry, and its potential for promoting economic development. It also had a pro-poor focus, and aimed to promote the involvement of small and micro-enterprises, local communities, women and youth in the development of tourism throughout the region. To encourage the private sector to invest in tourism, the SADC governments agreed to provide incentives, infrastructure and appropriate legal and

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<sup>3</sup> South Africa, Angola, Botswana, Congo, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

<sup>4</sup> See: [www.iss.co.za/AF/RegOrg/unity-to-union/pdfs/sadc/protols/tourism.pdf](http://www.iss.co.za/AF/RegOrg/unity-to-union/pdfs/sadc/protols/tourism.pdf), downloaded on 15 October 2007.

regulatory frameworks. The SADC protocol created a Regional Tourism Organisation (RETOSA). RETOSA's task is to market the SADC tourism sector. Its mandate is to develop common and co-ordinated marketing and promotion strategies.

**The** potential of tourism to contribute to economic and social upliftment in Africa is emphasised by the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). However, the NEPAD Tourism Action Plan also highlights the fact that tourism across Africa is performing below international standards. Key objectives are to create an enabling regulatory environment; strengthen the institutional capacity of tourism planning; improve tourism marketing especially on a regional basis; enhance research and development; upgrade tourism infrastructure and products; upgrade skills in tourism; and address the cross-cutting issues of gender, community involvement and HIV/AIDS (Rogerson 2007: 362).

There is significant tourism potential in the arid areas. South Africa, Namibia and Botswana are growing rapidly as tourist destinations (Rogerson 2007: 367). From 1995 and 2005, international arrivals in South Africa grew by 2.8 million, in Botswana by over 1 million, and in Namibia by 323,000. In Namibia, "desert tourism" is very prominent, particularly amongst European travelers. Botswana has a deliberate policy of promoting "low volume – high value" tourism, in order to promote the scarcity value of its tourism product, and to prevent pressure on fragile ecosystems. The Government has limited any lodge inside a game reserve to 24 beds. In this context, virtually all accommodation in protected areas is fully booked all year (Mearns 2003: 31). This offers a valuable opportunity for marketing the arid areas to offer the type of "tourism product" which will not undermine their ecology.

Borders have emerged as a "new frontier" in international tourism research (Rogerson 2003: 33). Cross-border can position regions more strongly in the market, because tourists will often have a regional rather than a specific destination in mind. It enables an ecological biome (e.g. the "Nama Karoo") to be marketed and branded. It can also allow the rationalization of investments in tourism infrastructure by allowing a sharing of facilities, such as airports (Cleverdon 2002: 23).

In the arid areas, the most dramatic cross-border projects have been the creation of trans-frontier conservation areas (TFCAs). TFCAs have the potential to conserve a greater diversity of species within larger geographical areas and to promote co-operation in wildlife management between nations (Spenceley 2006: 649). To date, seven of these parks have been created, including three in the arid areas: the Kalahari-Kgalagadi Park (over 14 600 square miles), which straddles South Africa and Botswana; the Ai-

Ais/Richtersveld Park, which includes areas in South Africa and Namibia; and the Gariiep Park, centered on South Africa's Augrabies Falls, and crossing into Namibia (Schiller 2000).

Another approach of relevance to the arid areas, is "route tourism", a concept which refers to initiatives to bring together a variety of activities and attractions under a unified theme (Lourens 2007: 474). Rural trails or heritage routes can be used to promote unexplored areas with valuable cultural resources. In particular, it can appeal to specific "niche" markets. An ambitious initiative to promote "route tourism" is the African Dream Project organised by the Open Africa Foundation, an NGO based in South Africa. Using donor funds, Open Africa has developed 59 routes in four African countries since 1999. The Foundation aims to create routes that directly contribute to alleviating poverty in Africa's rural and marginalised area, while celebrating and fostering African culture and promoting nature conservation (Lourens 2007: 476; Visser 2004). Open Africa has created four desert routes in the area which straddles South Africa and Namibia.

## **5 "Desert Tourism" and Regional Collaboration in the Arid Areas of Southern Africa**

"Desert tourism" is a potential new option on the tourism menu – and deserts often cross borders. Cross-border initiatives may play a major role to promote tourism in the arid areas of South Africa, Namibia and Botswana.

**South** Africa's ecological heritage has long been a drawcard for overseas tourists. However, its potential as a "desert destination" has not been fully appreciated. However, increasingly, the governments of Namibia, Botswana and South Africa are realizing that "desert tourism" is a potential niche market, for overseas and domestic tourists. The Northern Cape Province in South Africa has recently highlighted the attractions of Namaqualand and Kalahari, at the Indaba 2007 travel trade show in Durban (Travel Weekly 28 May 2007).

But as yet, desert tourism in southern Africa is limited by a wide range of issues.

- In South Africa, air travel to the Northern Cape is limited and expensive.
- There are only limited packages, which are offered to tourists. Tourism in the arid area of South Africa is only poorly integrated with the products offered by Namibia and Botswana.

- Provincial governments' funds for tourism development are extremely limited.
- Local cultures, such as the Nama, San and Khoi-Khoi are not adequately brought into mainstream tourism products, such as local cuisine.

### 5.1 The Role of the State in Developing Tourism in the Arid Areas

State institutions can have an impact on how tourism is used as a vehicle for regional development (Telfer 2002: 125). This includes the central government, administrative departments, provincial and municipal departments, and regulatory agencies. Their tasks are: co-ordination, planning, legislation, promoting entrepreneurs, and protecting social and or environmental interests. Governments can invest in the general infrastructure of a region as well as in specific tourist infrastructure. They can also provide incentives for entrepreneurs. Significantly, governments can identify tourism development regions to help structure programmes for the redistribution of wealth and to narrow inter-regional disparities.

Governments are well-placed to market destinations which encourage travellers to move beyond the established sites. The *White Paper on the Development and Promotion of Tourism in South Africa* (DEAT 1996) explicitly stated, as one of its economic goals, “To facilitate balanced tourism development in South Africa”. According to the White Paper: “Tourism brings development to rural areas ... Many of the prime tourism attractions are not located in the city centres but in the rural areas. Tourism allows rural peoples to share in the benefits of tourism development, promoting more balanced and sustainable forms of development”.

In South Africa, Namibia and Botswana, provincial and municipal institutions have significant infrastructure management capacity, but tend to be weak with respect to economic development. Effective tourism planning is, however, essential, because it provides linkages with businesses – businesses whose central activities are not directly related to tourism, but whose operations directly impacts on the ability of tourism operators to deliver a satisfactory level of service (for example construction, water, agriculture and transport) (Cleverdon 2002: 14).

The emerging desert cluster in southern Africa will have to evolve new institutions to facilitate collaboration. According to Smallbone et al. (2007: 26): “Internal cross-border regions emerge as new spaces of social and economic activity, ... eventually becoming centres of gravity of economic activity”. Such entities may gradually acquire more autonomy to develop and implement their own policies and to build their own institutions of governance. The “new regionalization” refers to increasing interconnections between areas, which are located in neighbouring states.

Specific measures can be taken to promote cross-border collaboration. This includes study tours, exchange visits, assisting cross-border partnership searches, hosting joint events, promoting business support networks, promoting regional branding, and planning and funding joint infrastructure, such as roads and airports (Smallbone et al. 2007: 160-7).

Good practice regional development policy needs to be sensitive to the specific strengths and weaknesses of the target regions, to determine potential competitive advantage. Clustering of firms can create positive externalities and increasing returns to scale. Such clustering can build on geographical ties, relational assets, local tacit knowledge, long-standing social norms, and local conventions of communication and interaction (Smallbone et al. 2007: 136).

Policy makers also need to build on and support existing enterprise initiatives (Neergaard and Ulhoi 2006). The state plays a major role in creating environments which allow market players to develop new rules of the game (Radaev 2005). Government needs to promote collective action and partnerships extending beyond government, and deploying the capacities of businesses, community groups and academic institutions (Smallbone et al. 2007: 125).

## 5.2 Learning from 'Best Practice'

An interesting example is that of Desert Knowledge Australia, which promotes the development of the "Outback" across provincial boundaries (DKA 2005). In South Africa, an important new initiative is the "Cape to Namibia Route", which was launched at the International Tourism Exchange trade show in Berlin in March 2007. This is a new strategic alliance between the Namibia Tourism Board, Cape Town Routes Unlimited, and the Northern Cape Tourism Authority. The aim is to stimulate new growth in the estimated 250,000 European and South African visitors that travel on this north-south route every year. Interestingly, Namibia's strong historical links with Germany made the new route an ideal tourism experience to launch at the Berlin trade show.

Another example from which Africa can learn is the European Union's LEADER programme that focuses on transnational co-operation in rural areas. Funds are made available to enable potential partners to derive a shared definition of co-operation projects, to have preliminary meetings, and to complete feasibility studies. In particular, this assists potential partners to attain a "critical mass" of their product.

In addition to government investment specific policy measures for regional development need to be undertaken concentrating on several different aspects:

1. Creating a vision for the region (e.g. by using symbols accepted by the regional community) to create a regional brand;
2. Developing the supply base for tourism (skills, education, innovations, communications);
3. Developing the demand-side of regions, by finding new niche markets and by promoting regional branding;
4. Developing the institutional framework (such as development agencies, business associations, political representation);
5. Promoting participatory decision-making and informational transparency to enhance the benefits for the local communities;
6. Identifying firm-level interdependencies, exchange relations, networks and synergies that work to local advantage, as well as those that hinder the development of local initiatives;
7. Building local social capital through projects designed to restore domestic pride/identification, community development programmes;
8. Targeting active labour market programmes towards vulnerable social groups such as young people, under-qualified people and ethnic minorities;
9. Assisting informal enterprises to upgrade their operations, by means of bridging loans and specialized services (Smallbone et al. 2007: 137).

These recommendations have major implications for regional, strategic, collaborative approaches to expand and extend the benefits of tourism – particularly to benefit the poor and local indigenous communities.

## **6 Beyond Elitism: The Potential of Tourism to Benefit the Poor**

There has been a great deal of research to investigate the possible impacts of tourism on local communities, and in particular, to create livelihoods. According to Telfer (2002: 121), “Tourism has the potential to generate growth and development, but it can also enhance inequalities if only the local elite benefits”.

South Africa, Botswana and Namibia are ex-colonial countries with a strong rural middle-class population (in most cases, white residents). Many of these property owners in the small towns and farms have embraced the economic potential of tourism with enthusiasm, energy and innovation. In effect, they function as important local elites, who have sufficient capital and entrepreneurial expertise to initiate tourism enterprises (although their capital base is often modest, by city standards). By means of their efforts, they have renovated and built facilities, and offer employment to local residents.

In the arid areas of South Africa and Namibia, white commercial farmers have played a major role in establishing game farms and small guest lodges within limited budget, often based on family savings. These entrepreneurs have several advantages: They provide employment; are well networked locally; and understand local environmental and ecological issues. In practice, these are the investors who offer the first round of employment to the poor.

The concept of “pro-poor tourism” has evolved to refer to tourism that generates net benefits for the poor. Various interventions may be useful ways to initiative pro-poor tourism (Ashley and Roe 2007: 80). Tourism can impact local livelihoods in multiple direct and indirect ways including SMME involvement, training, and improvement of local infrastructure, telecommunications, and contact with the “outside world”. The participation of the poor can involve developing cultural products (dances, tours, crafts) and supply linkages (food, materials and transport). Involvement of the poor in tourist enterprises can be promoted by giving the poor a legal stake in investments, by enhancing the voice of poor tourism producers at policy levels, and by facilitating participatory planning processes at the local level (Ashley and Roe 2007: 67). Empowerment of local actors in tourism ventures can contribute to communities’ psychological self-esteem, which leads to increased confidence to seek training and investment opportunities; social benefits which enhance the local community’s cohesion and innovation; and political benefits, whereby communities strengthen their own participatory mechanisms Scheyvens (1999, in Timothy 2002: 152).

It needs, however, to be considered that certain characteristics of tourism are more conducive to poverty alleviation than others.

Britton (1987, in Telfer 2002: 132) has shown that there are at least seven categories of tourism, ranging from highly concentrated investments to grassroots initiatives:

1. Large-scale foreign-owned enterprises;
2. Large-scale domestic enterprises;

3. Medium-scale enterprises controlled by local companies and individuals;
4. Small- and medium-scale enterprises organised as co-operatives at the village or community level;
5. Small-scale enterprises organised as individual or family businesses;
6. Small-scale enterprises organised by individuals and families as a supplement to simple commodity production.

In the southern African case, many tourism operators can be ranked as (3)–(5) businesses whereas community-based black enterprises would rank as (4) or (6). However, the situation is complex. In practice, there is not a clear demarcation line between “poor” and “non-poor” enterprises, or between “elite” and “community” enterprises.

There seems to be a general view that decentralised, smaller-scale tourism can have a greater impact on improving rural living standards, reducing rural-urban migration, rejuvenating rural communities, and countering structural inequalities of income distribution (Britton 1987: 183). However, in practice, it tends to develop gradually and incrementally. It also requires local skills, experience and capital accumulation before effective investment in tourism enterprises can take place.<sup>5</sup> Very often, local entrepreneurs are networked in complex ways, with intricate systems of mutual support and distribution of benefits. Thus, partnerships between sophisticated tourism operators and small-scale indigenous enterprises may be one of the most viable ways forward.

In the context of southern Africa’s arid areas, it appears that there is significant tourism potential, which *could* have significant pro-poor impacts. But these impacts need to be promoted and enhanced systematically. Cross-border collaboration can be very strategic in identifying potential support systems for development regions, whether on the demand or the supply side. The potential for pro-poor tourism exists, but there are no easy solutions. It will require institutional learning, across national borders, to design institutional measures to enhance the involvement of poor people in the burgeoning tourism industry.

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<sup>5</sup> It is worth remembering that community-based enterprises may also have unintended consequences, for example, increases in the price of land and goods (Telfer 2002: 136), which may create barriers for future entrants in the market.

## **7 From 'Pro-poor' to 'Community-based' Tourism**

Officially, South African and Namibian tourism policies promote community-based and pro-poor tourism, in a rather glib and uncritical way. The South African Government's *White Paper on Tourism* (1996) highlights the need for communities to benefit from tourism. They can seek partnerships with the established private sector operators, participate in decision-making with regards to tourism planning in their areas; and educate communities concerning tourism opportunities.

But South Africa remains fairly short on actual experience regarding community-based tourism. In the arid areas, there is an important social variable which either facilitates or obstructs community-based participation. In areas where indigenous, tribal social systems are still intact, it is possible to promote community-based projects; in areas where the indigenous population has been squeezed off the land and has become an urban-based proletariat in the small towns, it is almost impossible to have sufficient collective decision-making.

Different ways of involving poor people create very different types and levels of benefits for local communities, whether in the form of wages, casual earnings, business incomes, or collective incomes. There are also other potential benefits, such as skills training, improved local organisational capacity, more secure livelihoods, and a revival of cultural crafts. However, there are also potential negative impacts, such as community destabilization, the loss of land for livestock use, seasonal and unpredictable employment, wildlife damage to agriculture, and the intrusion of western values (Ashley 1998: 338).

An important distinction should be drawn between "pro-poor tourism" and "community-based" tourism. Pro-poor tourism refers primarily to the distribution to *material benefits* to the poor, and it could involve poor individuals in their individual capacity (such as craftsmen or traders). In contrast, community-based tourism suggests some level of coherent community-level *decision-making*, based on institutional systems within a community. The most celebrated concept in this regard is the Community-based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM). Within the CBNRM rubric, community-based tourism can be defined as tourism initiatives that are actually *owned* by one or more defined communities, or run as joint venture *partnerships* with the private sector with equitable community participation, as a means of using the natural resources in a sustainable manner to improve their standard of living in an economically viable way (Mearns 2003).

But community-based tourism is not a panacea. Significantly, neither the benefits nor the decision-making authority may be equally distributed. Not all community members involved in community-based projects are necessarily poor to start with. In fact, many communities are now dominated by members who have built up a capital base in other sectors, such as agriculture, transport businesses (such as taxis), or civil service employment.

Furthermore, local personalities can play a key role in either promoting or destroying community cohesion or participation in local tourism ventures. There is often a paradox that local tourism can flourish and may contribute to local economic development, at the same time as promoting inequality and even conflict. The advent of modernity and entrepreneurship in a local community is often fraught with new tensions.

It is also important not to assume that community control is a guarantee of social or environmental benefits (Timothy 2002: 154-5). The experience of small towns in the Karoo suggests that community members' responses to tourism are very uneven, and are as likely to cause conflict and social tensions. "The community" is a problematic concept, and often a cluster of different and potentially conflicting interests.

As a response advocating pro-poor or community-based tourism will therefore require careful attention to the according conditions. Lessons and experiences should be shared, and new institutions need to be created (such as business support agencies) which could assist new and small enterprises in the tourism market. Regional collaboration amongst districts, provincial and national governments would assist these efforts.

## **8 Promoting Pro-poor and Community-based Tourism in the Arid Areas**

As argued earlier, community-based tourism is generally more successful in areas where indigenous cultural social structures are still fairly intact. In particular, Transfrontier Parks have generated sufficient funding and skills to launch creative approaches to include local communities, and in particular, indigenous people, in the benefits of the parks.

A notable case is that of Riemvasmaak, a community located to the north of the Augrabies Falls, in the Kalahari. It is a land of rugged and rocky desert mountains, alongside the Orange River. In 1973, the community was forcibly removed because the South African Defence Force wanted the land for a military training ground. In 2002, the land title was returned to them. There

are now efforts to establish a community-based tourism venture in Riemvasmaak. A number of community members participate in the project, whether as office managers, marketers or cleaners (Vandecasteele 2007).

Namibia has also made significant progress towards community-based tourism and natural resource management – probably more so than South Africa. Since 1995, community involvement in tourism has been an explicit government strategy (Ashley 1998: 323). In particular, this has focused on communal lands, where tourism and conservation interests are brought together. In 1996, legislation was passed to enable communities to establish wildlife “conservancies”, which are legally registered bodies formed by a community, with a constitution, registered members, committees, and locally agreed boundaries, with rights to benefit from wildlife.

Similarly, in Botswana, over 50 community-based organisations are active in various fields of CBNRM in Botswana, ranging from thatching and grass harvesting, herbal tea marketing, handicraft production, campsite management and trophy hunting.

In Richtersveld in South Africa, community-based tourism has been linked to a land restitution claim by the Nama people. 85,000 hectares of desert have been allocated to the indigenous community. The Nama community entered into an agreement with South African National Parks (SANParks) which now leases the land from the local community. The proceeds are distributed by the Richtersveld Community Trust (Govender-Van Wyk 2007: 183). The local community is allowed to use the land for grazing, limited to a certain number of livestock. Furthermore, some of the community members have been trained in accommodation management, conservation, tour-guiding and bookkeeping (Govender-Van Wyk 2007: 195).

The Richtersveld experience has shown how community involvement in the tourism venture has generated benefits but also frustrations. Some people have been trained, but subsequently found that there is not sufficient work for them; some of the trained people do not actually enjoy the new work; and there have been accusations of nepotism and favouritism; which has led to disputes between the Richtersveld community and SANParks. Indeed, community-based tourism raises expectations and unleashes new ambitions, and it is very difficult to establish management systems which can accommodate the range of local attitudes, from conservatism to entrepreneurialism. It is, thus far, an unfortunate reality that the local authorities often do not have the skills or the staff to engage in these exercises, and much of the funding finds its way to expensive consultants (Govender-Van Wyk 2007: 203).

There have been relatively few experiments with community-based tourism enterprises in the small towns in the arid areas, but two examples should be mentioned. The first is the Kamammas Coffee Shop in Sutherland, a project funded by the South African Government's National Development Agency (NDA), and implemented by the local Unemployed Forum. The coffee shop and restaurant is run by five community members that work in shifts. They provide food, cakes and their venue can be hired for special occasions. These ladies have received training in business skills, catering, book keeping and first aid and receive R700 monthly each (Van Rooyen 2007: 80).

The second is the Apollo Development Association (ADA) in the town of Victoria West (Van Rooyen 2007). The ADA was established in 1988 to restore a disused Art Deco cinema in the town, the Apollo Theatre. It was managed by a board of ten members (three black teachers, three white persons, one farmer, one artist and one retired journalist) and three members of the municipality. The ADA had six permanent staff members, one of whom served as the CEO. The ADA's slogan was "economic development through culture, tourism and youth training"; and all its activities emanated from this basic mission. The ADA's activities included an annual Apollo Film Festival, film script-writing workshops, crafts development amongst local community members, and a catering and hospitality programme. The ADA's history has been mixed. Several very successful events were undertaken, including the development of a local art and crafts precinct. But the experience was undermined by conflicts, for instance with the municipality.

These examples show how local unemployed community members can become gainfully involved in tourism projects. However, the level of funding, technical support and management assistance should not be underestimated. Also, many community members lack professional organisational experience, which can easily lead to local conflicts.

## **9 Building Local Economic Multipliers**

Promoting pro-poor and community-base tourism is always a complex exercise, whether from a management point of view, or in terms of distributive justice. Another way of viewing the issue of addressing poverty is to promote local multipliers, where the focus is on keeping money circulating in the local economy, to the benefit of a wide range of local residents.

Such “local multiplier tourism” can promote the involvement of small enterprise in several ways: by *out-sourcing* (particularly functions such as food supply, laundry services, furniture production, transport and guiding), and by *in-sourcing* (the creation of independent service providers by groups of erstwhile employees) (Kirsten and Rogerson 2002: 38). Once again, there is a wide diversity of local entrepreneurs who may become involved. Such service providers may be local collectives or small businesses. Their “pro-poor” impact may be varied, ranging from offering formal employment to supporting informal trades and services.

But there are also significant practical challenges in promoting local multipliers. There is often a massive skill and capacity gap in the local community; there may be poor communication with government and private sector agencies; and pro-poor projects may actually have financial costs which are greater than government or private budgets can afford (Ashley and Roe 2002: 78). Moreover, business finance may be difficult to access.

Governments need to have proactive policies and programmes for supporting local tourism, and promoting local multipliers. Government commitment is essential, at the level of policy, regulations, spatial planning, infrastructure development, land tenure, business regulations and investment in skills (Ashley & Roe 2002: 75). Such interventions are required at all levels of government – local, district, provincial, and national. Additional funds from NGOs, donors or tourists may be needed to build the capacity of local entrepreneurs. A useful example of such support is the Namibia Community Based Tourism Association (NACOBTA), which is supported by the Green Development Foundation, a Dutch non-profit organisation that supports communities in their efforts to develop tourism enterprises in Namibia. NACOBTA assists its members through training, business advice, marketing, funding, advocacy and operating a booking and information office. Namibia’s experience with pro-poor tourism has been valuable, to highlight the institutional prerequisites for such strategies.

Such experiences are invaluable for Namibia and its arid neighbours. Instead of reinventing institutional mechanisms already active in Namibia, Botswana or South Africa, regional collaboration could enable shared learning, not only to promote tourism in the arid areas, but to promote the distribution of benefits to previously excluded communities and individuals.

## 10 Conclusion

Increasingly, development planners realize that development needs transcend artificial political boundaries. Natural resource management, regional business clusters, tourism and infrastructure development often have to be synchronized amongst provinces or nations. With the exception of transfrontier game parks, this kind of thinking has hardly surfaced in southern Africa.

The integrated development of tourism in the Nama Karoo would enable institutional collaboration to promote supply-side and demand-side development in the tourism sector. The attractions of the arid areas need to be marketed more effectively, and this will be strengthened by marketing a coherent region. At the same time, regional collaboration could promote institutional innovation and learning processes, and assist micro-enterprises and local communities to become more effective participants in tourism. However, as the discussion showed providing support to community-based tourism projects is not an easy endeavour. Consequently, collaboration across districts, provinces and among neighbouring nations would help in creating viable systems of support. Poor people can be involved meaningfully in the tourism sector, but it should happen against the backdrop of a sophisticated network of support. Given the paucity of financial and human resources in the arid areas of southern Africa, cross-border co-operation could provide the economies of scale which are required for such initiatives.

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